

Digging a Hole for God (MI)
 Mark 1:1-7 & Isaiah 40
 The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry
 Second Sunday of Advent
 December 6, 2020

Create in me a clean heart O God
 And renew a right spirit within me.
 In your holy name we pray.
 Amen.

Good Morning!

These days most mornings, I wake with a sense of foreboding. My eyes open and it is almost as if something is just off to the side, slightly out of my peripheral vision, “What is it?” I wonder. Then, I remember, pandemic is still here.

Vaccines are coming, hope is seemingly just over the horizon, but off to the side, COVID still resides. Deaths are rising, hospitals straining, front line workers exhausted. And I am so done, with a stilted life. I sigh all the time. I realize, I wake most mornings wondering if despite all my efforts I have the virus. I suspect, friends, I’m not the only one. When I stop and reflect, and scratch at the surface of my emotions, I find that beneath the cranky and sighing is fear.

I’m not particularly good at being scared. My spouse Susan always reminds me to pray. Sometimes, however, I prefer the time-honored technique of fretting, pacing, and brow furrowing. Nothing has changed in the world—but to be sure I feel worse.

If I were to follow Susan’s advice—what might this prayer look like?

God says to the prophet Isaiah,
*“Comfort, O comfort, my people—
 speak tenderly to Jerusalem
 and cry to her
 that she has served her term,
 that her penalty is paid,
 that she has received
 from the Lord’s hand
 double for all of her sins.”*

How then can we feel this comfort? In Mark’s Gospel—we hear again from the prophet Isaiah, “Prepare the way of the Lord?” How then do we do this?

Here’s the point where scripture strikes me as poetry and metaphor—beautiful poetry and metaphor—but still just words. And I find myself wondering how in heaven’s name

a metaphor will mend the economy or bridge the divisions of our country, how might poetry, heal the dying---

I say to myself, sacred Holy Scripture for sure, but still how do these words heal??

*Prepare the way—
go into the wilderness—
go farther out and deeper down.*
Invites Isaiah.

As a child, I spent an inordinate amount of time at the beach. Our four years living in Hawaii, from ages 8 to 12, only solidified what my infancy in San Diego began. From my childhood at the beach I have a deep and abiding reverence for all things water and waves. Water to me, specifically the Pacific Ocean, or these days Lakes Superior, Huron, Erie and Michigan, are images of God, icons of all that is Holy.

Early on I realized that like God—water will out. In the end, water winds where it wants to. There is nothing, in the end, that can stop water. We cannot, try as we might, we cannot staunch the flow of H₂O.

What I remember doing as a child, when I wasn't paddling my Styrofoam boogie board into the liquid golden path of the setting sun, what I remember doing was an inordinate amount of construction on the beach. And as opposed to my brother Kevin—who is now an architect—my specialty was excavation.

Kevin built castles and walls, I dug holes, moats and swimming pools. He built up—I dug down. Of course the cardinal rule of digging down in the sand—is that sooner rather than later—the sandy, damp hole will become a puddle or a pool filled with water that has come in from the sides or up from below. Water will out—if you dig down there is nothing that can keep it out. Water is there—below the surface—just waiting for us to create a place for it to collect and gather.

Which brings me to my point: God, like water is all around. God, like water, is waiting for us to prepare the way. God, like water, is waiting for us to stop stepping around the holes of our lives, avoiding the abyss of our fears, and instead God is hoping, waiting, longing for us to dig down deep into our fears and worries; to excavate them, to confront them, to carve out some space intimately, palpably, literally and metaphorically.

For when we dig deep down—we prepare the way—we create a space—for God who is all around—to visibly gather and coalesce in our lives. Dig down deep into our fears and God who is all around will seep sideways into our souls.

What's that look like? Digging holes— I can tell you what it is not. It's not avoiding the pain and jagged edges of our relationships. It's not embracing the belief that we are in control. It's not believing that we can do any of this on our own.

It is sitting down—taking the time to carve out the holes—in our schedules, in our lives, forming a place for God to collect. It might be sitting quietly in the evening, or early morning, watching snow fall, and Christmas lights glimmer. It might be attending your congregation's zoom mid-week services. It might be reading scripture daily, bits and pieces and then waiting, listening. It might be volunteering, safely, if you do not have pre-existing condition, at a local place offering hunger relief. It might be that donating and giving is not just limited to a Tuesday of this past week. It might be inviting in someone trusted, —to sit (virtually) with you on the edge of one of your holes. It might be taking the time to explain to someone just how deep and in over our heads we feel. And it might be climbing down in that hole and staying long enough waiting for God's healing water to float us gently back to the surface.

Prepare the way for the Lord. God will out. God is all around—prepare the way—prepare, create, excavate a place for our God.

Amen.